DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 479 757 SO 035 312

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TITLE	The No Child Left Behind Act and Public Preferences.
PUB DATE	2003-08-00
NOTE	27p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (99th, Philadelphia, PA, August 28-31, 2003).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Accountability; Achievement Tests; *Educational Policy; Educational Vouchers; *Elementary Secondary Education; Multivariate Analysis; *Public Opinion; *Public Schools
IDENTIFIERS	Elementary Secondary Education Act; Mandated Tests; *No Child Left Behind Act 2001; Opinion Polls; Preference Data

ABSTRACT

Less than a year after his inauguration, U.S. President George W. Bush secured passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, the cornerstone legislation of his administration. It was signed into law on January 8, 2002 and cost taxpayers $26.5 billion, the largest dollar increase ever in federal aid. No Child Left Behind is a revised version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. It represents the central federal law in pre-collegiate education and mandates requirements in almost every public school in the United States. Public opinion of pre-collegiate public education in the U.S. has not been well documented by researchers, perhaps because conventional wisdom holds that public opinion has little impact on public education policy. This paper examines whether conventional wisdom represents an urban myth or a fair assessment of the relationship between public opinion and educational policy. The paper focuses on the impact of public preferences on the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act. It begins with an overview of public opinion theories and briefly examines the historical public opinion of U.S. public schools. The paper discusses the historical opinion of the U.S. public about school vouchers and, to a lesser extent, about mandated student achievement testing. It presents an overview of the provisions included in the No Child Left Behind Act. The paper concludes with an analysis of public opinion and major components of the act. Using the January 2001 CBS News Monthly Poll and multivariate analysis, it examines the relationship among demographic, attitudinal, and environmental factors and support for three provisions of the act: (1) school vouchers, (2) mandatory testing, and (3) basing federal education funds on mandatory testing results. (Contains 29 references, 1 figure, and 1 table.) (Author/BT)

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The No Child Left Behind Act and Public Preferences

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ABSTRACT

Less than a year after his inauguration, President George W. Bush secured passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, the self-professed "cornerstone" of his administration. This law was signed into law on January 8, 2002 and cost the taxpayers $26.5 billion, the largest dollar increase ever in federal aid. The No Child Left Behind Act is a revised version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and represents the central federal law in pre-collegiate education and mandates requirements in almost every public school in the United States. It is predicted to enlarge the federal role in public education (Education Week on the Web 2002).

Public opinion of primary and secondary public education in the United States has not been well documented by researchers and scholars. This may be because conventional wisdom holds that public opinion has little impact on public education policy. This paper will attempt to determine if conventional wisdom represents an "urban myth" or a fair assessment of the relationship between public opinion and educational policy. The focus of this paper will be on the impact of public preferences on the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, the current central federal law in primary and secondary education. This paper will begin with an overview of public opinion theories. Next, the historical public opinion of America's public schools will be briefly examined. Subsequently, the historical opinion of the American public on school vouchers and to a lesser extent, mandated student achievement testing will be discussed. This will be followed by an overview of the provisions included in the No Child Left Behind Act.

This paper concludes with an analysis of public opinion and major components of the No Child Left Behind Act. Using the January 2001 CBS News Monthly Poll and multivariate analysis we examine the relationship between demographic, attitudinal and environmental factors and support for three provisions of the act: school vouchers, mandatory testing and basing federal education funds on mandatory testing results. Initial investigation of simple frequencies indicates mixed public support for federal education policies. Respondents of the survey placed education in second (closely behind the economy) as the most important problem facing the nation—indicating public support for changes in education policy. Nevertheless, support for individual provisions of the Act varied significantly. While respondents overwhelmingly favored mandatory testing, they were nearly diametrically opposed to basing federal funds on the results of these tests. Finally, multivariate analysis indicates that while demographic and environmental factors impact public opinion, party affiliation was the only factor to consistently play a role across all three policies.

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Public Opinion Theory

The government of the United States is a republic, where representatives speak for the preferences of their constituents and make binding policy decisions that affect all (Rossiter 1961). According to Erikson et al. (1994, 1), "popular control of public policy is a central tenet of democratic theory." We judge the capability of democratic government by the responsiveness of lawmakers to the desires of the public in addition to the practice of large-scale participation in civic life. In elections, the citizenry can select officials that are likely to represent their policy preferences. If these officials do not represent their desires sufficiently, they can be replaced in subsequent elections (Erikson et al. 1994). However, there is a lot of debate amongst scholars on whether or not public officials act on the behalf of the citizenry when making policy (Sharp 1999; Edelman 1964).

Sharp (1999) proposes five theories for explaining the relationship between public policy and public opinion. These models include the non-attitudes, manipulated opinion, responsiveness, non-responsiveness, and broken thermostat approaches. In the non-attitudes model, policy change is insensitive to public opinion. Advocates of the manipulated opinion theoretical perspective believe that public preferences are engineered into alignment with legislation that lawmakers have already passed. The responsiveness approach suggests that policymakers pass laws that are in line with mass public opinion. The non-responsiveness interpretation holds that public policy does not reflect the opinions of the mass public. The final theory Sharp develops is the broken thermostat sequence. This approach holds that initially policy is responsive to public opinion. However, mass opinion does not adjust itself to the policy change and consequently this opinion creates more policy demands. These demands result in a

period of policy commitments that are responsive to public opinion, but the public does not acknowledge these policy assurances.

Given the mixed public attitudes towards school vouchers, it is difficult to identify a theoretical framework to understand the policy-opinion connection of this reform. Nevertheless, the non-responsiveness approach appears to come closest to modeling the policy-opinion connection with regard to school vouchers. Most polls indicate that the American public does not favor the usage of school vouchers for parochial schools. However, some polls indicate that respondents favor vouchers when parental choice is suggested or if schools are failing. In this case, the responsiveness approach may be helpful in understanding this school choice option with regard to poorly performing schools. Public polls show strong support for mandatory testing (in principle). Therefore the responsiveness approach seems to be the best candidate for interpreting the policy-opinion connection for achievement tests. However, the public does not support the usage of mandatory tests as the sole determinants of grade promotion or high school graduation. Consequently,the non -responsiveness approach is a better model for understanding given these circumstances.

Synopsis of General Public Opinion of America's Public Pre-collegiate Schools

American public schools have never been considered centers of academic excellence (Schlechty 1997), however, public regard of the American school system was relatively high from the early twentieth century until the 1970s. Starting in the 1970s and continuing to the present day, opinion polls indicate that the public has limited faith in public schools (Tyack and Cuban 1995). Part of the impetus for reorganization and reform of public education comes from a prevailing attitude that an educational crisis exists. This "crisis" has been declared by many

esteemed panels, and is supported, in part, by quantitative research that indicates declining achievement test scores and unfavorable comparisons to other nations that were historically considered inferior to U. S. schools in terms of scholastics. The term crisis implies that conditions could exacerbate quickly and irrevocably and that conventional solutions such as increased spending and attracting better teachers have failed (Henig 1994). Also, crises are usually crucial in persuading public opinion and subsequent policy formulation (Gersten 1997; Kingdon 1995).

Public Opinion and School Vouchers

Vouchers, which represent a major component of the No Child Left Behind Act, have historically suffered from low public support. Voucher proposals failed largely as a result of fierce opposition from those in the educational community in addition to the skepticism or apathy of the American populace (Henig 1994). In 1972, the first voucher program was implemented in Alum Rock; a suburb of San Jose, California, funded through President Lyndon B. Johnson's Office of Economic Opportunity. The project lasted six years and did not produce any conclusive evidence for the continued support or criticism of school voucher plans (Chubb and Moe 1990; Doyle 1981; Henig 1994; Henig and Sugarman 1999; Mintrom 2000).

The idea of school choice did not end with the conclusion of the Alum Rock experiment. There was a growth of other school choice reforms such as alternative public schools and magnet schools. However, school vouchers did not enjoy much success in the late 1970s and 1980s. In 1979, John Coons and Stephen Sugarman (Berkeley professors) attempted to place a school voucher initiative on the California ballot. However, they

were unable to secure the necessary signatures needed to qualify for the ballot (Henig and Sugarman 1999).

The Excellence Through Choice in Education League secured placement of Proposition 174 (a voucher initiative) on the California ballot in 1993. It provided for vouchers up to $2,500 to any public school student who transferred to a private school, and an additional $2,500 would be returned to the state's general fund for possible reallocation to public schools. However, the California Teachers Association (CTA) spent $16 million on a campaign to defeat this initiative. Advocates of Proposition 174 found it difficult to convey their message and were only able to raise about $2 million. Furthermore, it had little support from interest groups and public officials (Hanus and Cookson 1996). School voucher initiatives appearing on the Michigan and Washington, D. C. ballots in 1978 and 1981 respectively met with similar defeat (Bulman and Kirp 1999).

In 1983, the Citizens League, a policy research group, proposed an equity-based voucher plan that would permit financially disadvantaged parents to send their children to private schools in Minnesota. However, members of this group faced considerable opposition from education groups and teachers' unions and did not have the political clout to secure passage of this legislation. The campaign failed, but unlike previous attempts in California, the proposal was on the public agenda (Bulman and Kirp 1999).

President Ronald Reagan attempted to secure passage of a market-based voucher plan during his administration but Congress rejected this proposal twice. After the second rebuff, his administration submitted a proposal to Congress that allowed districts to use some federal funding to supply vouchers to financially disadvantaged children in need of

remedial education. This proposal was also rejected. After this defeat, this administration abandoned voucher centered education reforms and focused other forms of school choice such as magnet schools. President George Bush (1989-1991) maintained this policy during his administration (Bulman and Kirp 1999). As demonstrated, the transition of vouchers from an idea to a policy enjoyed low public support from the early 1970s to the early 1980s.

A Nation At Risk (1983), a report published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, contributed to the perceived crisis in American education and, in part, facilitated reform in the public schools. This report was critical of the condition of the education system in the United States and expressed concern about the implications for the future of this country. In the words of the commission, the ability of America to maintain a dominant standing in "commerce, industry, science, and technology" is "at risk." According to the Commission, the problems in education included the functional illiteracy of over 20 million Americans, American students' lower performance than students from other first world nations on more than fifteen academic tests, the perpetual decline in achievement test scores, and the proliferation of remedial courses at the college level (Carr, Cayer, Cochran, and Mayer, 334, 1999). States and school districts across the country responded to this report with a number of strategies including mandating standardized tests and offering parents broader school choice.

A widely cited work, *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*, by John Chubb and Terry Moe, was published in 1990. The authors of this book advocated addressing the education "crisis" through market-based voucher policies. Chubb and Moe supported their claim with data that indicated that the test scores of students with similar socioeconomic backgrounds perform better in school systems with voucher plans than in

public schools without them. This book received considerable attention from policymakers; nevertheless it did not dispel negative opinion about school vouchers.

Despite the attention drawn to vouchers by Chubb and Moe, efforts to pass voucher initiatives failed in Oregon in 1990, in Colorado in 1992, and in California in 1993. Measure 11, the market-based school choice initiative in Oregon, would have amended the state constitution to allow a tax credit of $2,500 to any family with children in private schools, in religious schools, or in home schooling. It would have also permitted open enrollment to all of Oregon's public schools. However, it failed by a two to one margin. The Colorado initiative was very similar to the Oregon one, and would have allowed a $2,500 voucher to parents in private schools, but not to children who were home schooled. It also failed by a similar margin. The initiative in California would have offered a voucher, worth about half the average public school cost per student to all families with children in private schools. There is evidence that suggests that voters supported vouchers in general, but were concerned that vouchers would benefit the wealthy, drain the public schools of funds, and largely support private schools (Bulman and Kirp 1999).

Even though school vouchers lacked public support in the 1970's and 1980's, it gained political support in the 1990s. Currently, there are three public school voucher programs in place. One is in Milwaukee, which was established in 1990. Another voucher program was created in Cleveland in 1996 and a statewide voucher program was developed in the state of Florida in 1999. The implementation of these voucher programs has not been without controversy. These programs have been challenged in the courts. Nevertheless the U. S. Supreme Court voted in a 5-4 decision (June 2002) that voucher programs were constitutional (Walsh 2002).

Public Opinion and Student Achievement Tests

Unlike vouchers, the policy opinion connection between student achievement testing and public opinion is not well documented. The origins of these tests can be traced back to the development of IQ tests at the turn of the Twentieth Century. These tests have been used to rank and sort children, sometimes along racial and class lines. Almost every state in America passed policies mandating student achievement testing in response to the report *A Nation at Risk*. Advocates of these tests feel that they will bring about high standards in teaching and learning. Some also feel that it will produce high skill levels and an internationally competitive workforce (Rethinking Schools 1999).

Common complaints lodged against these tests are that they drive curriculum and instruction in a manner that harms students. It has been argued that teachers are subjected to intense pressure to prepare pupils for these exams, even though they do not necessarily assess the most vital aspects of learning and thinking. It has also been suggested that students sometimes internalize the results of these tests and regard them as the final word on one's knowledge and/or potential (Rethinking Schools 1999).

In recent years, there has been a backlash against student achievement tests. In Ohio, there is a "Say No" campaign where parents are informed that they can exempt their children from the 4th, 6th, or 12th grade Ohio Proficiency Tests, which are utilized to determine graduation and grade advancement. In Oregon, some teachers have challenged the state's standards and tests and are creating alternatives to the "Trivial Pursuit-like social studies and multiple-choice tests" (Rethinking Schools 1999). In Texas, the Mexican-American Legal Defense Fund asked the courts to declare the requirement that pupils must pass the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills in order to graduate from high

school unconstitutional. The Local School Councils Summit in Chicago worked with a national group (FairTest) in order to create parent-friendly information detailing the inherent problems in standardized tests (Rethinking Schools 1999).

No Child Left Behind Act

This Act includes many components ostensible to promote gains in student achievement and to hold schools and states more accountable for student progress. One of these measures is annual testing. States must develop their own standards for what a student must know and learn for every grade. Standards must be developed in mathematics and reading immediately. Beginning with this school year, schools are required to administer tests in each of three grade spans testing state developed standards. These spans are grades 3-5, grades 6-9, and grades 10-12 in all schools. By the 2005-06 academic year, states are required to test pupils yearly in mathematics and reading. Beginning in the 2007-08 school year, science achievement must also be tested. A sample of 4th and 8th graders in every state must also take part in the National Assessment of Educational Progress testing program in reading and math each year so as to provide a comparison point for state test results (Education Week on the Web 2002; U. S. Department of Education 2002b).

States must bring all pupils up to the proficient level on state tests within twelve years. However, each state, district, and school is expected to make progress toward meeting state standards. Individual schools must meet yearly targets toward this goal for both their pupil populations and for certain demographic subgroups. Examples of these subgroups include the financially disadvantaged, racial and ethnic minorities, and students with disabilities or limited English proficiency (Education Week on the Web 2002; U. S. Department of Education 2002b).

This act also provides parents with choices in regards to their children's education. An important element of this legislation is the provision where parents with children in a school identified as in need of improvement will be able to use federal education dollars in the form of vouchers to obtain "supplemental educational services" (U. S. Department of Education 2002b). These services include tutoring, after school services, and summer school programs. These services can be obtained at religious, secular, public, or private schools. One other choice option available to parents under this legislation includes the provision where parents can send their children to a better performing public school or a public charter school if their child is attending a school in need of improvement. If a school fails to meet its progress target for two consecutive years, its students must be offered the aforementioned choices. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, almost $200 million in federal funds was allocated to state and local communities to create and fund charter schools (U. S. Department of Education 2002b).

There are other provisions included in this act that are not part of the focus of this paper. However, a discussion of some of these provisions is necessary to understand the measures analyzed in this paper in the context of other reforms. Another provision of this legislation is the issuance of state report cards. Beginning with the 2002-03 academic year, states are required to create annual report cards indicating student-achievement data categorized by subgroup and information on the performance of individual school districts. Districts are also required to provide similar report cards with individual school data. Another provision of this act is the mandate that every teacher working in a public school must be highly qualified. Under this law, highly qualified means that teachers must be certified and demonstrate proficiency in their subject matter. Starting with the 2002-03 school year, all new teachers hired with Title I money must be highly qualified. Within three years, all school paraprofessionals must have completed a

minimum of two years of college, obtained an associate's degree or higher, or met an established quality standard. This requirement went into effect immediately for newly hired paraprofessionals. A new competitive grant program (Reading First) was created. Nine hundred million dollars were allocated under this program in 2002 to help states and districts set up scientific research-based reading programs for children in grades K-3 with priority given to poverty stricken locales. A smaller early-reading program was created in an attempt to help states better prepare 3-5-year olds in high poverty areas to read (Education Week on the Web 2002; U. S. Department of Education 2002b).

Data and Methods

To examine the relationship between school vouchers, mandatory testing and tying federal funding to mandatory test scores and public support, we use the January 2001 CBS News Monthly Poll. This poll was chosen because it was conducted close to the 2000 election and asked questions regarding a number of President Bush's election promises including those related to the No Child Left Behind Act. Initial investigation of these relationships began with the analysis of simple frequencies starting with the question, "What is the most important problem facing the United States Today?" Respondents of the survey placed education in second (112 respondents or 12.4%) -- closely behind the economy (135 respondents or 14.9%) as the most important problem. This indicates public support for changes in education policy. Nevertheless, support for individual provisions of the Act varied significantly. The findings in Figure 1 shows how support for these policies vary. For example, while respondents overwhelmingly favored mandatory testing (83% favor); they were nearly diametrically opposed to tying federal funds to the results of these tests (76% against).

Multivariate analysis is used to explore how individual demographic and attitudinal factors may have resulted in varied support for these education policies. Each dependent variable (support for vouchers, support for mandatory testing and support for tying federal funding to mandatory test scores) was examined separately in individual models. The dependent variable in Model 1 is "support school vouchers" measured by a dummy variable where 1 indicates that the individual supports school vouchers and 0 otherwise. The dependent variable in Model 2 is "support mandatory testing" and is measured by a dummy variable were 1 indicates that the individual supports mandatory testing and 0 otherwise. The dependent variable in Model 3 is "supports basing federal funds on mandatory test scores" and is measured by a dummy variable were 1 indicates that the individual supports this policy and 0 otherwise.

The history of school vouchers and mandatory testing suggests that, in part, support for these policies is based on ideological grounds. Support from policymakers has come primarily from Republicans. To control for partisanship, two dummy variables are included for Democrat and independent with Republican as the reference group. Since individuals can be affected by these policies differently, a number of control variables were included for demographic factors. We control for education measured on a 5-point scale and a dummy variable for male respondent. To control for race and ethnicity of the respondent, African Americans, and Latinos were coded 1 and 0 otherwise, with non-Hispanic whites and Asians as the reference group. We did not control for Asians separately because they are almost identical to whites with regard to their support for the individual policies. Age was measured in years and a 5-point scale was used for income where the lowest category indicated a total family income under $15,000 and the highest category indicated a total family income over $75,000. Finally, a variable is included for the number of children in the household under the age of 18.

By merging the survey data with state level data, we are able to explore several aspects of the state environment in which individuals form opinions about public policy. The first is exposure to direct democracy. Previous research suggests that state electorates with frequent exposure to direct democracy (ballot initiatives) have a greater knowledge of public policy (Tolbert, McNeal and Smith 2003). This suggests that there is an education value associated with direct democracy. Interest groups in their attempts to gain passage or defeat of initiatives wage an issue advocacy war. Through these battles, the public can become informed about policy. Despite the educational benefits, a danger occurs if one side does not have sufficient funds to be heard (Lupia 1994; Magleby 1988). At the state level, the most dominant interest group is the public school teacher lobby (Thomas and Hrebenar 1999). As illustrated by the defeat of Proposition 174 in 1993, the public school teachers lobby has sufficient resources to overshadow most opponents in the battle over education policy. As a result, the information about education policy obtained by the public through issue advocacy has a potential for being one-sided. To control for the impact of the initiative process on public opinion, the number of initiatives appearing on the state ballot for 2000 is included in the models to measure exposure to direct democracy.

The second state environmental factor included in the models is state racial diversity. Previous research (Hero and Tolbert 1996) indicates that much of the variation in state educational and social policies can be explained by racial/ethnic diversity. They found that in states with heterogeneous populations, blacks and Hispanics were more likely to benefit from favorable policy outcomes unlike states that were homogeneous or bifurcated. The state racial context is measured by an index of racial and ethnic percentages, created for the fifty states using

2000 census demographic data on the size of the black, Latino, Asian and non-Hispanic white populations using the formula presented in Hero and Tolbert (1996).

The No Child Left Behind Act may not impact each state equally; some states depend more heavily on the federal government for their education budget. The percent of the state education budget received from the federal government for the 2000-2001 school year (Gaquin, Ryan and DeBrandt 2003) is included to control for this difference. Additionally, states do not equally provide for education. The quality of education that was currently being provided could influence public opinion regarding the need for educational reform. To control for this factor, the average money spent per day per student for public primary and secondary education was included for 2001 (U.S. Census Bureau 2002).

Finally, mandatory testing is not a recent policy innovation; it has already been implemented in most states. Where it appears to create the most controversy is in states where it is used to determine graduation and grade advancement. In recent years, we have seen a backlash in states such as Ohio and Texas where student achievement tests have been utilized for these purposes (Rethinking Schools 1999). To control for the impact the implementation of student achievement testing is already having on public opinion; two dummy variables will be included in the models related to mandatory testing. The first is coded 1 if a state in the 1999-2000 school year used mandatory testing to determine high school graduation and 0 otherwise. The second is coded 1 if a state in the1999-2000 school year used mandatory testing to determine grade advancement (U.S. Department of Education 2002a).

Findings

In the models reported in Table 1, the dependent variable is coded so that higher scores are associated with increased support for the education policy. Since the dependent variables are binary, logistic regression is used. The results are explained in the "what matters" box below, and the regression tables are provided in the appendix.

WHAT MATTERS

The only statistically significant differences are reported below (See Table 1).

1. WHO WAS MORE LIKELY TO FAVOR VOUCHERS?

Individuals in States That Receive a Higher Percentage of School Funding From the Federal Government and that Spend More Per Day Per Student, Republican, Younger, Lower Education Attainment

2. WHO WAS MORE LIKELY TO FAVOR MANDATORY TESTING?

Individuals in States with Higher Minority Diversity and Lower Initiative Use and That Do Not Currently Use Mandatory Testing to Determine High School Graduation, Republican, Male, Has Fewer Children

3. WHO WAS MORE LIKELY TO FAVOR BASING FEDERAL FUNDS ON MANDATORY TESTING RESULTS?

Individuals in States with Higher Minority Diversity, Republican, Male, Older, Lower Education Attainment, Has Fewer Children

For school vouchers (54% against/ 46% support), a combination of ideological, environmental and demographic variables impacted support. Republicans, less educated and younger respondents favored vouchers. In addition, individuals who live in states that receive a greater portion of their education budget from the federal government and spend more money per day per student are also more likely to support vouchers.

While support for school vouchers was nearly evenly split, there was strong support for mandatory testing (83% favor/ 17% opposed). This strong support seems to mirror the sentiment that education is one of the more pressing problems in the U.S. The rhetoric surrounding mandatory testing is based on accountability and may satisfy a psychological need of the public that something be done and that schools be held accountable. Males, those with fewer children, as well as Republicans were more likely to support mandatory testing. Individuals opposing mandatory testing include those who live in states where mandatory testing is used to determine high school graduation, have low minority diversity and a greater number of initiatives on the ballot in 2000.

Even though there appears to be support for holding schools accountable, there is nearly as strong a belief that it should not be done at the expense of children. While there was overwhelming support for mandatory testing, there was nearly as strong an opposition to tying federal funds to the scores from mandatory tests (76% opposed/ 24% favor). Support for basing funds on test scores is driven by a combination of ideological, demographic and to a lesser extent, environmental factors. Females, younger respondents and those with higher numbers of children were less likely to favor this policy while Republicans were more likely to support it. The only environmental factor impacting support was minority diversity. Those individuals living in states with greater minority diversity were more likely to favor basing funding on test scores.

Despite the differences in support for each policy, several trends stand out. The first is the importance of ideology. The only regularity in all three policies is that Republicans were more likely to favor them. For vouchers, the antilog of the unstandardized coefficient for Democrats was 0.398 and 0.528 for independents, indicating that Republicans were 2.51 times more likely

than Democrats and 1.89 times more likely than independents to favor vouchers. In addition, Republicans were 1.77 times as likely to favor mandatory testing and 2.65 times as likely to favor basing federal funds on these tests as Democrats. When compared to independents, Republicans were 1.65 times more likely to favor mandatory testing and 2.02 timesas likely to favor tying federal funds to the results of these tests. While less consistent than the results for ideological factors, the demographic variables also suggest a pattern. The findings that individuals with more children and lower education levels were less likely to support 2 out of the 3 policies indicates that opinions are also being determined by how individuals expect to be impacted by them.

Another trend is the importance of environmental factors. For both mandatory testing and federal funds, minority diversity was positively related to support for the policy. This, to some extent, corroborates Hero and Tolbert (1996). They argued that in states with higher minority diversity, education policies that were positive or at the least neutral toward blacks and Hispanics were more likely to be passed. This suggests that that the positive relationship between minority diversity and support of mandatory testing may be the result of citizens having experienced positive (non-discriminatory) education policies and are less likely to anticipate negative consequences from new ones. The negative relationship between support for achievement tests and whether a state already uses them to determine high school graduation is consistent with the backlash that is taking place in states like Ohio and Texas. Finally, the negative relationship between the number of initiative and support for mandatory testing is consistent with the fact that battles over education policy usually take place at the state level. At this level, interest groups can be more important that political parties in determining support/opposition for particular policies when they are brought to the agenda through initiatives or referendums.

Conclusion

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the results. Simple frequencies indicate that the public does support changes in the education system but has mixed opinions on which policies should be implemented. While opinions are mixed, one consistency is prevalent across all three policies—ideology is important. In each case, Republicans were more likely to show support for the measure. Even for mandatory testing (where there was overwhelming support), Republicans were 1.8 times as likely as Democrats to favor the policy and 1.7 times more likely than independents to support it. This relationship between party affiliation and policy preferences may not always be as important because, in general, the battle over education policy is fought at the state level. Often these battles over policy make their way to the agenda through devices such as initiatives and referendums, which are brought to ballot by interest groups (not parties).

Unlike the No Child Left Behind Act, which was championed by President Bush, policies brought to the ballot through direct democracy mechanisms usually do not come with party cues. Public opinion therefore is formed through issue advocacy campaigns, not party symbols. This can have a positive impact on the democratic system if all sides of an issue have sufficient resources to inform the public about the issue. However, as the history of vouchers and mandatory testing shows, educational groups and teachers unions play a dominant rule in educational policy at the state level and can overshadow opposing sides in the battle for public support. This is important because education policies and their impact can be complex and difficult to understand. It may be difficult for the public to otherwise inform themselves about education policy except through what they gleam from issue advertisements. The complexity of

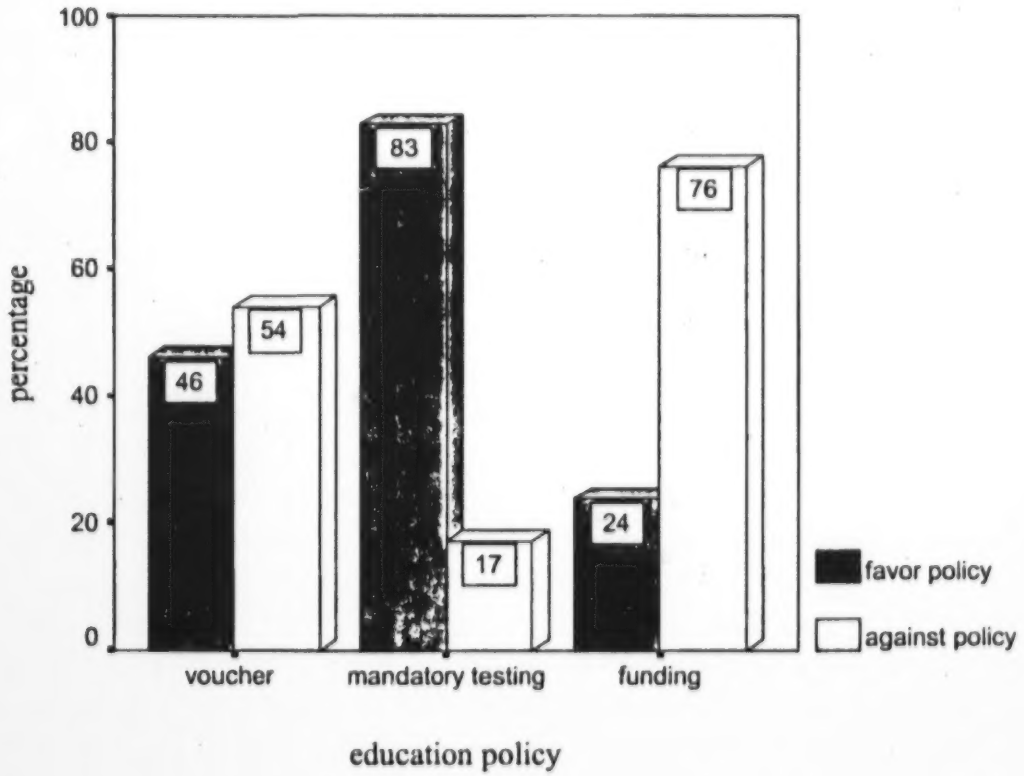
education policy is suggested in the models of this report by the fact that the percent of the state education budget from the federal government was a significant factor in predicting whether an individual supported vouchers but not if they supported tying federal funds to mandatory test scores. One would expect that if the public fully understood the implications of the policies that the percent of the education budget coming from the federal government would be a key factor in predicting support for tying these funds to mandatory test scores.

The best theoretical framework to understand the policy-opinion connection for the No Child Left Behind Act is unclear. After examining several components of the Act, we find public support for these policies varied. Mixed public opinion regarding these measures is consistent with the history of these reforms. The responsiveness approach developed by Sharp is useful in explaining public preferences and policy between vouchers in regards to parental choice and poorly performing schools. This perspective is also helpful in explaining the relationship between public support of student achievement tests for grade promotion, high school graduation, and as achievement indicators for schools, parents, and the community. However, the non-responsiveness approach is beneficial in understanding the relationship between public support and the usage of vouchers at parochial schools. This perspective is also beneficial in understanding the linkage between public support and the usage of these tests as the sole determinant for grade promotion and high school graduation. The inability to find a definitive policy-opinion connection for education policy seems to be the result of how the public informs itself about education policy. The issue area is complex and the public must rely on a combination of party cues, demographic factors and issue advocacy—all of which may not always be in agreement.

This brings us to the question, "Does public opinion have any impact on public education policy?" The findings to this study are murky and the answer is a resounding maybe. Public support or lack thereof most likely will affect the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act. School boards, districts, and schools will be the institutions that execute this policy rather than the federal government and therefore will be crucial in determining how this law is carried out. Public opinion most likely is going to be important factor in determining how local government ultimately carries out this policy. How the public informs itself about this act and other education policies represents an odd mixture of party cues, issue advocacy and personal factors. At times this may give considerable power to interest groups or political parties in directing how the public initially thinks about an education policy. This suggests that the political actors (i.e. interest groups and political parties) are ultimately determining education policy. On the other hand, education policy directly impacts all individuals. As the backlash against student achievement tests indicates, the public may not initially understand the implications of specific education policies but if they are subject to negative outcomes they can become motivated to create change.

Regardless of whether public opinion impacts education greatly or not, this topic should receive greater scholarly consideration. If political actors (i.e. interest groups and political parties) are ultimately determining education policy and public opinion has little impact, this represents a break down of democratic principles. Research should be undertaken to determine how to reverse this outcome. If public opinion is playing a greater part than is believed, then research is needed to put to rest the "urban myth" of minimal public impact and to understand how the public is influencing policy.

Figure 1: Support for Education Policies



Source: CBS News. CBS NEWS MONTHLY POLLS, January 2001.

Table 1: Public Opinion on Education Policy

VARIABLES	VOUCHERS		MANDATORY TESTING		FUNDS TIED TO MANDATORY TESTING	
	β (se)	Sig.	β (se)	Sig.	β (se)	Sig.
Environmental Variables						
Percent Federal Funding	**.115(.042)**	**.007**	-.013(.056)	.822	.033(.475)	.491
Money Per Student	**.000(.000)**	**.053**	.000(.000)	.839	.000(.000)	.770
Minority Diversity	.187(.474)	.698	**1.331(.779)**	**.088**	**1.242(.744)**	**.095**
Number of Initiatives	.004(.029)	.901	**-.080(.039)**	**.039**	-.038(.044)	.391
Mandatory Tests Determine H.S. Graduation			**-.630(.235)**	**.007**	-.111(.208)	.596
Mandatory Tests Determine Grade Advancement			-.250(.231)	.280	-.166(.209)	.425
Individual Level Variables						
Democrat	**-.933(.177)**	**.000**	**-.491(.239)**	**.040**	**-.970(.210)**	**.000**
Independent	**-.644(.177)**	**.000**	**-.567(.240)**	**.018**	**-.701(.202)**	**.001**
Age	**-.016(.005)**	**.001**	-.000(.007)	.244	**.014(.005)**	**.008**
Male	.067(.145)	.643	**.354(.196)**	**.070**	**.625(.169)**	**.000**
Latino	-.008(.309)	.979	.150(.448)	.737	.139(.369)	.706
Black	-.294(.269)	.274	.208(.362)	.565	-.142(.356)	.690
Education	**-.144(.068)**	**.035**	-.465(.091)	.628	**-.155(.078)**	**.048**
Income	-.020(.063)	.746	.050(.085)	.553	.010(.074)	.895
Children	.050(.155)	.749	**-.539(.207)**	**.009**	**-.379(.190)**	**.046**

Constant	-.093(.749)	.901	**3.961(1.023)**	**.000**	**-1.462(.833)**	**.098**
-2 Log Likelihood	1178.592		769.054		920.062	
Percentage Correctly Predicted	59.9		83.7		77.0	
Wald Chi-Square	60.508	.000	51.707	.000	67.929	.000
N	896		918		897	

Source: CBS News. CBS NEWS MONTHLY POLLS, January 2001. Logistic regression estimates; standard errors in parentheses. Statistically significant coefficients at .10 or less in bold.

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